

**COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA**  
**Proposed Resource Management Plan**  
**and Final Environmental Impact Statement**

**CHAPTER 1—PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR PLANNING**

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**1.1 Introduction**

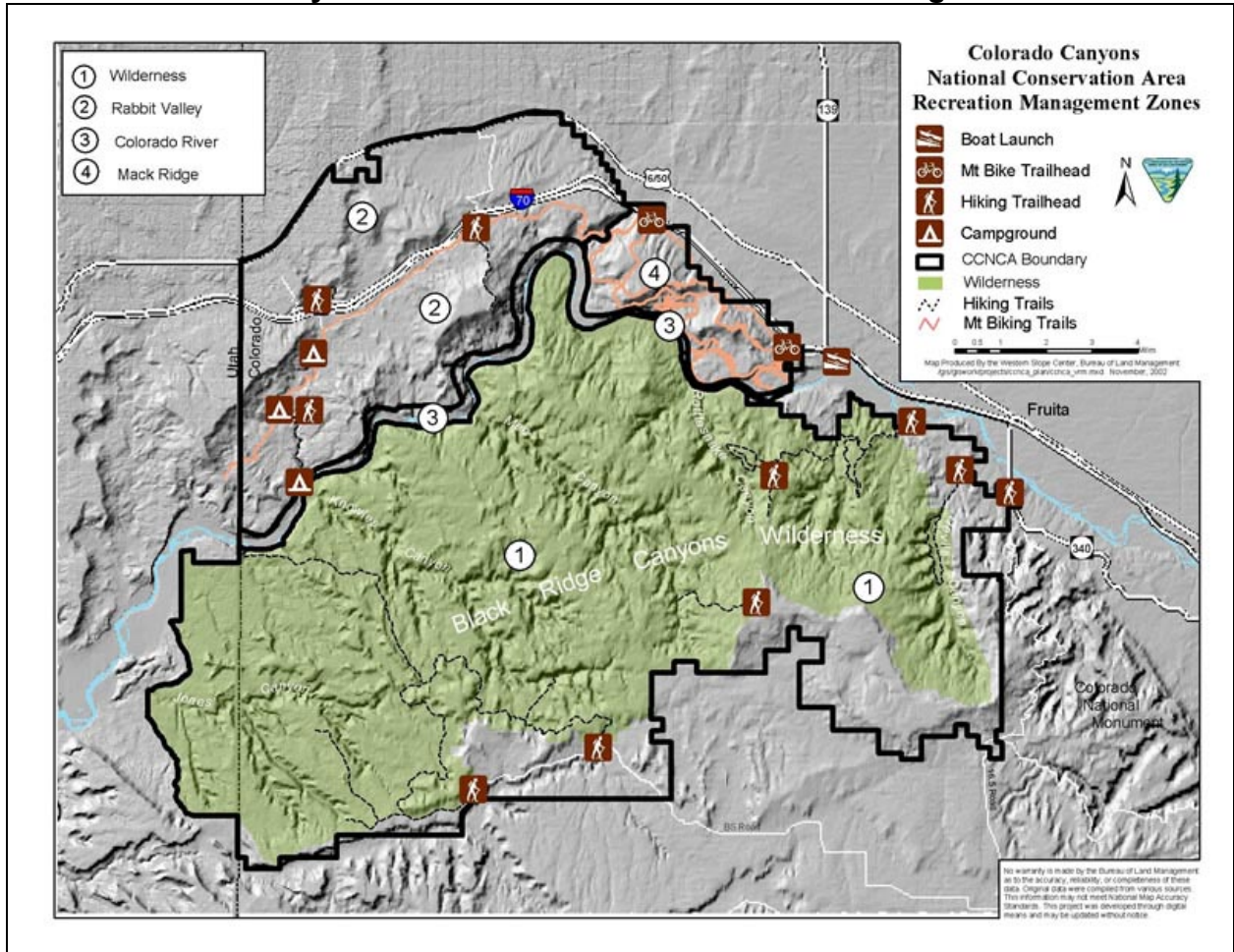
The Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) was officially designated on October 24, 2000, when the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000 (the CCNCA Act) became Public Law 106-353. The Act designating the CCNCA requires the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop a comprehensive Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the long-range protection and management of the CCNCA. This RMP incorporates the BLM core objective of multiple use, allowing for as wide a range of activity as possible, while protecting these spectacular resources for future use and enjoyment. This document also represents the collaboration and communication among local citizens; organizations; and local, state, and federal governments for over two years. A federally authorized Advisory Council was established to assist the BLM in developing and implementing the CCNCA RMP. The CCNCA Advisory Council comprises ten members of the public representing various popular uses of the area. To further facilitate the planning process, Working Groups were formed based on four major geographic areas in the CCNCA – Mack Ridge, Rabbit Valley, the Colorado River Corridor, and the Wilderness. Each planning zone offers unique settings for recreation opportunities (see Figure 1-1).

**1.2 Description of the Planning Area**

The 122,300-acre CCNCA, located west of Grand Junction, Colorado, is a collage of natural wonders featuring rugged sandstone canyons, natural arches, spires, and alcoves carved into the Colorado Plateau, through which runs a 24-mile stretch of the Colorado River. Included in the CCNCA are 75,550 acres of Wilderness designated as the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness (BRCW) with 5,200 acres extending into eastern Utah at the CCNCA's western boundary.

The CCNCA offers a broad variety of resources and recreation opportunities resulting in users with diverse interests, including hiking, biking, float boating, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, horseback riding, hunting, wildlife watching, backpacking, camping, and grazing resources; as well as world-renowned geological, paleontological and scientific sites.

**Figure 1-1  
Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area Planning Zones**



The four planning zones, as mentioned above, and their typical activities are:

**Table 1-1  
CCNCA Planning Zones and Primary Activities**

Mack Ridge Zone	Mountain bike riding and horseback riding
Rabbit Valley Zone	Off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding, hiking, Native American rock art viewing, camping, wildlife watching, mountain bike riding, horseback riding, and grazing
Wilderness Zone	Hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, grazing, and hunting
River Corridor Zone	Boating, hiking, and camping

### 1.3 Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of the CCNCA Resource Management Plan is to fulfill the requirement of The CCNCA Act to develop a comprehensive management plan for the long range protection of the special and unique values of the public lands making up the CCNCA, including the Black Ridge Canyons, Ruby Canyon, and Rabbit Valley.

Management of the area has most recently been guided by the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Integrated Resource Management Plan (1998) and the CCNCA Act. Additional guidance has been provided by the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (1987), the Grand (UT) Resource Area Management Plan (1985) addressing the Utah portion of the CCNCA), and several other activity-level management plans covering recreation, wildlife, grazing, and watershed management. All of these plans have provided a basis for the development of the new CCNCA RMP, which will supercede all previous plans upon finalization and release.

The CCNCA RMP addresses new management requirements resulting from the designation of the Conservation and Wilderness areas. The Act specifically states that the land within the CCNCA is withdrawn from entry, appropriation, patent, or disposal under any public land laws, mining laws, and mineral/geothermal leasing laws. Activities in the Black Ridge Canyons are to be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act. The Black Ridge Canyons area has been managed as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) for many years, and the Wilderness designation will have little impact on most current activities. Valid existing rights, including grazing allotments, will continue to be recognized. In addition, associated rights of access will be allowed in the same scope and frequency as before the Wilderness designation. The Wilderness Act does not allow for roads (permanent or temporary); use of motor vehicles or boats, or any form of mechanical transport; use of motorized equipment; landing of aircraft; facilities, structures, or installations; or commercial enterprise within a Wilderness area. Historical use, authorized access by grazing permittees, wildlife management agencies, and, in emergency situations, fire or rescue operations may prompt cases of permitted, nonconforming use.

The legislation also included specific directives for some activities in the CCNCA:

*“Off-Highway Vehicle Use...shall be allowed only on roads and trails designated for use of motor vehicles in the management plan...”*

*Hunting, Trapping, and Fishing...shall be allowed within the Conservation Area and the Wilderness in accordance with applicable laws and regulations of the United States and the States of Colorado and Utah.*

*Grazing...the Secretary shall issue and administer any grazing leases or permits in the Conservation Area and the Wilderness in accordance with the same laws (including regulations) and Executive orders followed by the Secretary in issuing and administering grazing leases and permits on other land under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management.”*

The Act included requirements for the RMP as follows:

*“The management plan shall... (A) describe the appropriate uses and management of the Conservation Area and the Wilderness; (B) take into consideration any information developed in studies of the land within the Conservation Area or the Wilderness; (C) provide for the continued management of the utility corridor, Black Ridge Communications Site, and the Federal Aviation Administration Site as such for the land designated on the Map as utility corridor, Black Ridge Communications Site, and the Federal Aviation Administration Site; (D) take into consideration the historical involvement of the local community in the interpretation and protection of the resources of the Conservation Area and the Wilderness, as well as the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Integrated Resource Management Plan, dated March 1998, which was the result of collaborative efforts on the part of the Bureau of Land Management and the local community...”*

#### 1.4 Planning Issues

A planning issue is defined as a matter of controversy, dispute, or general concern over resource management activities, the environment, or land uses. While planning issues drive the RMP, many other basic environmental and management issues are also addressed to provide comprehensive management guidance for all resources and to satisfy legal requirements.

In this planning process, each Working Group identified planning issues specific to each of the four planning zones within the CCNCA. Management recommendations were then developed by those groups,

reviewed by the BLM interdisciplinary team of resource experts, and presented to the Advisory Council for discussion and revision or approval.

Some of the identified issues are listed below:

1. Will land parcels bordering the CCNCA be acquired?
2. What type of education, information, and interpretation will be provided to visitors?
3. Will group-use areas for picnics, camping, and events be provided?
4. How will designated and dispersed camping be addressed?
5. Will private inholdings be acquired and what uses will be allowed on them if they are?
6. How will critical wildlife habitat areas be managed?
7. Will requirements for fire pans and human waste disposal systems remain or become more comprehensive?
8. How will noxious weeds, especially tamarisk, be controlled?
9. Will a monitoring plan be developed to identify significant deterioration of natural resources?
10. When and where can a permit/fee system be expected?
11. Will group sizes be restricted?
12. How can management actions be enforced?
13. How will access to the Wilderness be maintained?
14. How will urban/Wilderness interface issues be managed?

## 1.5 Planning Criteria

Planning criteria identify the legal, policy, and regulatory constraints that direct the BLM or limit the agency's ability to resolve issues. Planning criteria are based on standards prescribed by applicable law and regulations, agency guidance, information pertinent to the planning area, as well as coordination with other government agencies and the public. These criteria guide the BLM in developing management alternatives for the CCNCA and include the following:

1. The RMP is a comprehensive management plan for the long-range protection and management of the CCNCA and BRCW.
2. The RMP reflects the legislative intent to conserve, protect, and enhance the area to benefit current and future generations and the unique and nationally important values of the land.
3. The RMP complies with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and all other applicable laws. It meets the requirements of Public Law 106-353, designating the CCNCA, to protect its natural resources and outstanding recreation opportunities.
4. The planning process includes an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will comply with the standards of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.
5. The planning process involves the local community and recognizes the results of previous collaborative planning efforts, most notably the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Integrated Resource Management Plan.
6. To enhance community involvement in the planning process, an Advisory Council has been established to advise the BLM on RMP development and implementation.
7. The planning process involves consultation with Native American tribes and provides strategies for protecting recognized traditional uses and areas of cultural and religious significance.
8. The RMP considers the geological, cultural, paleontological, natural, scientific, recreational, environmental, biological, wilderness, wildlife education, and scenic resources, allowing establishment of interpretive sites or facilities designed to protect these resources.
9. The RMP sets in place management goals and objectives for the 75,550 acres designated as the BRCW, as a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System and in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964.
10. The RMP recognizes that neither the CCNCA nor the Wilderness shall include any part of the Colorado River.

11. The RMP establishes travel management goals and actions to allow motorized vehicle use only on roads and trails designated for motorized use; no cross-country, motorized travel is allowed.
12. The RMP allows continued management of grazing leases and permits in accordance with current BLM policy and with the Wilderness Act.
13. The RMP recognizes the Colorado Division of Wildlife's (CDOW) responsibility to manage wildlife on BLM-managed lands. The BLM consults with CDOW in establishing policy for the purposes of protecting public safety, administration, and public use and enjoyment.
14. The RMP provides for continued management of the utility corridor, Black Ridge Communication Site, and Federal Aviation Administration Site.
15. It has been recognized, throughout the planning process, that recommended actions cannot effectively establish buffer zones adjacent to the CCNCA boundary.
16. The RMP encourages the acquisition of private inholdings within the CCNCA and Wilderness, while continuing to allow reasonable access to private landowners.
17. Decisions in the RMP strive to comply with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, state, and federal agencies, as long as the decisions conform to the CCNCA legislation, other laws and regulations, and other applicable legal or regulatory guidance.
18. Known cultural resources are assigned to use allocations with associated management goals and prescriptions to achieve these goals.

This RMP meets the challenges presented in this planning process by incorporating the requirements of the enabling legislation; by determining the implementation status of previous decisions; and, with the aid of both the citizens' Advisory Council and Working Groups, by identifying and addressing new issues that have emerged since the Ruby Canyon Plan's publication in 1998.